

JOAN MOMENT



Joan Moment's paintings are an immutable paradise of invented forms; her landscapes are night visions of tropical gardens, underwater worlds, lush oases inhabited by fantastic creatures—haunting, forgotten Edens in which familiar flora and fauna are transformed into exotic, otherworldly creatures existing in a place devoid of time or events.

Moment's paintings are not narrative; in them things do not take place because what is essential in the work are the forms themselves; the birds, fish, people, animals, plants, trees, sky, land, and water are created forms that resemble real ones but whose painted configurations are remote enough from their living counterparts to be recognizable, yet foreign. The mystery and poetry of the painting, its trancelike luminescence, exists in the objects themselves.

The flat, iconic quality of Moment's work has personal sources as well as art-historical ones. Among her favorite visual references are several out-of-print, 19th-century encyclopedic books such as Kerner's *Natural History of Plants* (1894) and the *Pictorial Museum of Animated Nature*, the latter profusely illustrated by different artists; it is the inaccuracy of the drawing that fascinates

her, the primitive quality of depictions of many animals that the artists had never actually seen.

Moment's images are composed of dots of colored pigment on a black rubberized ground; the obsessive quality of the painting reflects her passion for collections of objects, among them plants, an extensive selection of Hawaiian shirts and bolts of cloth, plastic pocketbooks from the 1940s and 1950s, thousands of postcards of unusual plants (especially cacti), people, and land formations, and eccentric household objects and furnishings which are nostalgic and unorthodox to most contemporary eyes.

The art of accumulation, to which her dotted images are one response, is an aspect of an early American folk tradition which has interested her for many years. Quilt making and traditional "women's work"—the tactility of sewing and weaving, for example—were explored and subverted by the artist in some early pieces such as a balloon quilt and a series of abstract, pale paintings made of hundreds of condoms embedded in latex. When, in 1972, she turned to painted images of common objects such as boots, a ladder, a dog, buttons, sombreros, palm trees, and later, gorillas, the obsessive activity of making

objects was transformed into the obsessive vision of a single depicted object, isolated and unencumbered by its function. A painting exhibited in the 1973 Whitney Biennial, *Cactus Palm*, described by one astonished observer as looking “like mural decoration in a bad Mexican restaurant,” was flat, graphic, uncompromising, and to some of us, terrifically funny. It, like the work in the present exhibition, relates to a west coast artistic sensibility in which non-art references, humor, nostalgia, and an ironic, romantic world view are as important as formal concerns. The work of artists who also live in the Sacramento area, like Gladys Nilsson, Karl Wirsum, and Mary Warner, has been influential to Moment in this respect.

Moment’s recent paintings, because of their visual density, overall activity, and flatness are also reminiscent of Byzantine mosaics and Persian and Turkish miniatures, New Zealand aboriginal bark paintings, and the San Blas Island *molas* she is attracted to. Also important are the work of American primitives such as the painter Morris Hirshfield and Simon Rodia, who built the Watts Towers in Los Angeles.

Moment’s work shares with these sources a

concern (unconscious in the case of many primitive artists, in her case deliberate) with the invention of new forms that, as icons, have symbolic reference and are used over and over again from painting to painting. Moment uses the silhouette to this end, because it acts as an anatomical guideline within which she can invent; the colored forms against a black background emphasize the silhouette, allow the surface to scintillate, and create a magical, luminous atmosphere—like a garden lit up at night.

Moment’s vision, like her paintings, changed radically when she moved in 1970 from the stark, arid landscape of Colorado to Sacramento, where she was entranced by its unfamiliar tropical foliage, especially the many gardens and rows of tall palm trees flanking the capitol buildings there. Since that time, her work has become increasingly fantastic; the paintings of the past two years, seen here, offer us an intimate, keyhole view of paradise, a still and magical world that seduces, enchants, and capitivates us with eccentric, impossible delights.

Marcia Tucker
Curator



Biography

- 1938 August 22, born in Sellersville, Pennsylvania
- 1960 B.S. and R.N., University of Connecticut, Storrs
- 1970 M.F.A., University of Colorado, Boulder
- 1968-70 Taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder
- 1970- present Teaches at Sacramento State University in California

One-Woman Shows

- 1973 Candy Store Gallery, Folsom, California
- 1974 Wenger Gallery, San Francisco

Selected Group Shows

- 1970 "Squirrels and Potatoes: An Exhibition of Post Card Imagery," Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, Louisiana

"Group Show," Candy Store Gallery, Folsom, California

"Gags Galore," University of Colorado

"California Artists Drawing Show," traveling exhibition sponsored by the San Francisco Art Institute

1972 "The Sacramento Valley," San Francisco Art Institute

"The Great Big One," Candy Store Gallery, Folsom, California

"Sacramento Sampler I," E. B. Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, and Oakland Museum. Show traveled to museums in Brasilia, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Recife, Brazil

"Ladder Show Invitational," Artist's Contemporary Gallery, Sacramento

1973 "1973 Biennial Exhibition: Contemporary American Art," Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Cover: *Tree on Fire*, 1974

Acrylic on watercolor board

25 x 22"

Privately owned

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Whitney Museum of American Art

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